8
The Participation Forum*

December 15, 1994

Topic: The Role of Participation in Conflict Resolution

How can a participatory approach help to resolve conflicts among peoples with different ethnic and national identities, conflicts over resources, and challenges to the legitimacy of national governments and leaders? What can participation possibly mean in settings where people have been killing each other? At the eighth session of the Participation Forum, four presenters examined these and related questions. Dick McCall, USAID Chief of Staff, opened the discussion with some observations from the Greater Horn of Africa. Jennifer Douglas, Senior Policy Advisor for Humanitarian Assistance in PPC, presented highlights from the recent USAID-sponsored conference, "Honing the Tools of Preventive Diplomacy." Gordon Wagner, OFDA consultant, drew from his 14 years in the southern Sudan to describe how bottom-up development activities can be used to help break through conflict situations. Jerry Delli Priscoli from the Army Corps of Engineers and president of the International Association of Public Participation Practitioners presented examples from the U.S. and overseas to illustrate factors that are key to successful participation in conflict management. The presentations were followed by a discussion session that brought out the experiences of several Forum participants.--Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participatory Development.

Good News from Somalia

Dick McCall

Creative Projects. About three weeks ago, I chaired a Somalia aid coordinating body meeting of bilateral and multilateral donors in Geneva. The purpose of the session was to get a handle on managing the gradual UNOSOM pull out which will be complete at the end of March.

During the session, a number of non-governmental organizations and the World Food Program told some of the good news about Somalia—mainly about events in areas outside of Mogadishu. Some very creative projects have been carried out, for example, using food to pay teachers, doctors, and health care workers to get clinics started again. There are local projects—education, health, and basic rehabilitation—that reflect local ownership. The local communities themselves are primarily in the driver's seat. The point is that once these activities get started, security is no longer a problem because the communities have an investment that cuts across political faction lines.

The Participation Forum is a series of monthly noontime meetings for USAID personnel to explore how to put into practice the Administrator's mandate to "build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved" ("Statement of Principles on Participatory Development," November 16, 1993). Guest speakers from in and outside of USAID describe their experiences and enter into a general discussion of the theme of the session. A summary of the meeting is disseminated within USAID by E-mail, and readers are encouraged to engage in an E-mail dialogue. E-mail should be directed to Diane La Voy, using either the USAID directory or INTERNET, as DLAVOY@USAID.GOV. Printed copies of the Forum summaries will be distributed to participants and attendees from outside of USAID and others interested in participatory development.

In some areas of Somalia, these projects represent the first time that people didn't have to wait for resources to meet basic needs to come trickling down from the central government. This is an example of how participation and local ownership help populations themselves to begin reconciliation and to manage their own crises in a more effective manner. Such management cannot be imposed from the top.

The biggest mistake UNOSOM made in Somalia was attempting to impose structures from the top instead of taking advantage of the traditional structure, which despite the violence within it, is highly participatory and democratic. The clan mechanism brings in local communities to discuss issues and attempt to reach a consensus. It's a slow moving process, but when a decision has been made within a clan, and when consensus has been reached between the clans, the result is a more durable solution.

Bringing Government Institutions Closer to the People. In Ethiopia, USAID and the European Union have a difference of opinion on the issue of decentralization and the push by the government to provide greater autonomy to the various regions, which historically have had ethnic rivalries. I can remember lengthy discussions with the EU representative on the Greater Horn, who made the point that, given the spread of Islamic fundamentalism throughout that region, it is important to have a strong central government in Ethiopia. I argue that the facts prove otherwise. Countries threatened by Islamic fundamentalism have highly centralized governments that haven't been able to successfully control fundamentalism. The Ethiopians recognize that rather than attempt to control fundamentalism, they should decentralize and bring government institutions closer to the people, give people greater control over those institutions, and increase their capability to hold those institutions more accountable. What Ethiopia is doing is rather experimental within the African context. But it is worth close examination, because the old way of dealing with ethnic diversity has precipitated much of the violence that has characterized Ethiopia over the past 25 years.

Lessons for the Aftermath in Rwanda. We are struggling with Rwanda now, looking at the aftermath of the genocide. Hutu and Tutsi competition goes beyond clan rivalry—it is conflict based primarily upon control of resources. In many ways, Somalia is easier to deal with because clans have a traditional way of reaching consensus. But there are areas of Rwanda where interactions between Tutsis and Hutus historically have demonstrated that they can live together, work together, and participate in enterprises together. Therefore, one of the fundamental focal points in dealing with the Rwandan crisis should be to figure out a way to break down the barriers at the local level with projects and programs in relief and rehabilitation that are directed at bringing people together to focus on common problems and find common solutions.

Striving for a "Social Contract" of Participation in Sudan

Gordon Wagner

Sudan is now in its twelfth year of civil war. It is estimated that upwards to a million and a half people—mostly civilians—have died during this period. Millions more are living as refugees in neighboring countries or as internally displaced persons in their own country. We now are only beginning to comprehend the complexity of this emergency and, as such, are beginning to realize that much of the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community has done as much to deepen and prolong this crisis as it has to soften and reduce the suffering of the people.

In early 1993 USAID/OFDA began a critical review of funding criteria in the past, which necessarily challenged the relief/development dichotomy. This new thinking took inspiration from the 1992 congressional "Horn of Africa Recovery and Food Security Act" (PL 102-274), which is premised on serving the needs of the people with life-saving resources, while building upon the enormous production possibilities of the people to restore first their subsistence capabilities and then their capacity to handle their own affairs and provide for their own needs through a real participatory partnership among all the humanitarian actors operating in southern Sudan.

Participatory Approach in Practice. Relief food has saved lives during the last two years, but it has also fueled and prolonged the war through forced diversions by the combatants. At the moment, the WFP is adopting a food economy methodology which would allow a better targeting of the needy. Much work remains to be done.

On the other hand, food production has increased dramatically, despite the doubting Thomases at the UN and within the NGO community. In the greenbelt of Western Equatoria, the August/September and December/January harvests are being purchased to feed the displaced in the area and refugees in places like northern Uganda. Production has increased because programs have emphasized food production by local residents and—to a smaller extent—by the displaced people living in camps, rather than relief. Several NGOs are assisting to revive the very successful cooperative movement in Western Equatoria of the 1980s.

Turning over responsibility for managing the affairs of southern Sudan to the southern Sudanese themselves has been critical. Three levels of local organization capacity building are getting attention. The first and most important is at the grass roots. Several NGOs are emphasizing restoring family self-sufficiency through empowerment of the villagers. Without the empowerment of people at this level, work at the other two levels would do nothing more than restore the old system that the rebels opposed.

Second, we have begun to target the NGOs. A growing number of indigenous NGOs are appearing on the scene. Many of these, however, are just "honey pot seekers," so the Sudanese, with full support from OFDA, are tightening their criteria for recognizing such groups.

Third, workshops are being held with the humanitarian organizations associated with the two main rebel movements. Both have been too tightly connected to their respective military overseers. They are becoming quite aware of the fact that any funding of these organizations in the future is critically dependent upon both groups translating their rhetoric on participation and self-sufficiency into substance. Currently, both groups are discussing the values and principles which ostensibly underpin their objectives. Whether this will lead to structures which are facilitating and supportive of local initiatives remains to be seen.

The Need for a Social Contract. Both the Horn of Africa Act and the current Greater Horn of Africa Initiative (GHAI) must be seen as truly radical departures from the Cold War thinking of the past decades. Here we are beginning to see politics at its proper vocation. To speak of partnerships is one thing. But to create and sustain effective partnerships first requires a consensus on fundamental principles. Interestingly, there is a commonality between principles laid down in PL 102-274 and those to which the rebel movements have given official support. The key, however, is translating these principles from paper to real social contracts.

In fact, there are already signs that such principles are beginning to be realized at the lowest level of operation. For example, in the case of scores of marketing cooperatives in Western Equatoria, small groups of like-minded people are writing simple constitutions which include the principles mentioned above and the all-important one-person-one-vote decision-making procedure. This is nothing less than economic democracy at work. At the level of operations in the field we are beginning to see local authorities coming together with NGOs and the United Nations to form local coordinating committees.

To be effective, however, social contracts based in common principles must be pursued aggressively. The example of the Combined Agencies Relief Team (CART) in Juba should be noted here. In 1986 eight very independent—and not so cooperative—NGOs came together in recognition of their inability to handle the humanitarian crisis which was unfolding in Equatoria. While the record of CART has been mixed, it is also a fact that its successes over the last nine years have been a function of its working constitution, which is based in common humanitarian principles including the one-agency-one-vote decision rule. This approach needs to be replicated everywhere. It is at the local level that resolution of local conflict has the best chance of being handled. The same kind of social contract should be made between the government, its international partners, and the people. The approach described above will not likely be implemented successfully without being framed in a working social contract at all levels of operation.

Espousing common principles based in real partnerships should not be seen as excessively naive. Indeed, to ignore this opportunity will yield more of the same of the past: wasted resources, prolongation of crises, donor fatigue, and neglect of the suffering peoples of the world.

Participation in Conflict Resolution

Jerry Delli Priscoli

At the Army Corps of Engineers' Institute for Water Resources, I've been involved with developing public participation programs and what we call alternative dispute resolution programs (ADRP) for the last 20 years. The following stories illustrate the concept of participation in conflict resolution.

Participation of Stakeholders. In south Florida land development and in southeast Louisiana, where permits had been requested for exploratory oil drilling, typically, we would wait for a permit, review it technically, fight about it, and go to court. Hundreds of these requests would occur per year in each area. Instead of going through this process again and again, we tried something new. We figured out who was going to be fighting in the local community—the citizens, a variety of environmental groups, lawyers in New York—and we convened them, giving them the opportunity to talk about setting the specifications for these permits. If they came to agreement, this agreement would, in effect, be the permit. If they didn't, then we would go back to the old system.

The Truman Dam—a major dam in the Missouri River—is the scene of another participation success story. People have been fighting about its operation since it was built, complaining that thousands of fish were being killed. Navigation, hydropower, ecological and other interests would fight over proper operation. So we brought all parties together and challenged them to write the operating rules for the Truman Dam within broad specifications of technical acceptability. What they produced became the operating plan and it is still used today. We have learned that agreements resulting from negotiations from the ground up are broader than those from the top down. Lawyers and engineers can often use their expertise, even if unconsciously, to limit options as opposed to expanding them.

The common thread with these success stories is the participation of stakeholders and the articulation of their interests. These interests inform one another and transform the negotiation process into a learning process, building a confluence of dispute resolution, collaboration, and participation.

Having said that, I must point out that the two concepts diverge as well as converge. The field of dispute resolution is driven by values of efficiency, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and decision making. The participatory notions of creativity, open access to government, and the self-helping citizen are less evident in dispute resolution. For example, the techniques of dispute resolution may be used to plan $400 million or $500 million waste incinerators. Agreements may be signed but implementation stops because some significant interests in the community do not want the stuff burned. Significant stakeholders in the community were left out. Only the in-crowd produced the agreement.

Creative Solutions Through Participation. When I began 20 years ago, I discovered that social scientists are sometimes the least likely group to be implementing the participation activities. They want to study the problem but not be present with it. Of course, they are well-meaning people and turn out superb information, but they often make little link between the information and building participation. I heard some stories recently when I was facilitating a Global Environmental Facility Meeting with the World Bank and UNDP. After someone from IMF had said something like, "We have an anthropologist to study this," somebody from the Amazon community being discussed, in pure frustration, said, "Who knows the community better? The anthropologists or we who live here?" I think this example demonstrates that there are different ways of knowing and bringing knowledge to bear on a problem.

On the issue of building a relationship between the technical experts and those whom they would be serving, I often hear people, especially engineers, ask why we are doing this thing called participation. The answer is easy: we get better technical results. Why? Because the process is a creative process. Participation can create options that no one had thought of before, or a combination of alternatives that, in effect, present a different option. Instead of saying, "We have three options—channel right, channel center, or channel left"—a participatory approach may show that greenspace is the best option. Getting the technical experts to think in such creative terms is the issue, and liberating technology in a way that makes sense to people is what participation is all about.

Beyond participation at the project level, participation at the cross-sectoral level, in the case of water for example, can make an enormous difference. There the question is how to trade off different uses of water for agriculture, for industry, and so on. The notion of participation deals directly with the ideas of governance, authority, and relationships that are value-driven, and not merely technical. We fall back on the notion that development is a technically defined process because we can't deal with the notion that it is value-driven and based on some idea of what is good in the world. That's too tough. But until we get it right, more process activities will be invented to deal with the value-driven aspects of relationships required for development.

Technology in the Service of Participation. On the other hand, it is possible to use technology in the service of participation. In the last few years, some phenomenally useful interactive computers have been developed to allow ordinary people—even illiterate people—to join with political and technical people to create and design, in our case, water systems and contingency plans for drought. Their results are equivalent or better than the complicated hydraulic models produced by smart academics.

An Ethic of Informed Consent. In conclusion, infrastructure issues, such as water resource development, can provide great learning ground for creating a civic society through participatory processes. Old notions of paternalism in development are giving way to a new approach that is driven by an ethic of informed consent within communities. I also think we need to look at our technology and use it to serve some of these participatory beliefs.

Discussion Session

Local Ownership on a National Level

Barry Sklar (International Center for Economic Growth): All the speakers referred to local ownership, a concept that has been the basis of ICEG's philosophy in dealing with local institutes and communities. Working with them on projects that they believe in and will press for with their national authorities is the only way to effect change. In the category of conflict resolution, ICEG participated in a project in El Salvador sponsored by the USAID mission to bring together for the first time the various political groups, the private sector, and the former revolutionaries at the same table.

Jean North: In Rwanda the mission supported some interesting processes to help people in the public and private sector develop some common ownership of changes in the way national finances were managed. Until chaos came, there was a lot of give and take to get agreement on the common good in terms of the management of national finance. We shouldn't limit our concerns for participation only to the local levels.

What Role for Central Government?

John Eriksson: As I heard some of the observations on Somalia, Rwanda, and southern Sudan, it struck me that these experiences may contain the seeds of a new paradigm. The conventional paradigm is working directly with the central government. The new paradigm is working directly with local communities, while not completely ignoring the central government. For official donors, that probably means having to go through NGOs.

In the case of Somalia, I have a vision of working to strengthen institutions and governance wherever one may find them geographically—notwithstanding whatever semblance remains, if anything, of central government. But how long can a situation like that go on? How meaningfully can we talk about sustainable development of local communities without any reference to the essential functions that we've been trained to believe are the responsibility of the central government, ranging from transportation networks to monetary and fiscal policy, to international trade, the whole gamut of those kinds of responsibilities and functions?

People have a tendency to underestimate what happens in societies like Somalia. The civil war was basically fought over the issue of a strong central government. Most Somalis don't believe that they need a strong central government. They want a highly decentralized system.

What happened in Somalia? Everybody said that "everything" had collapsed. But about a year and a half ago, an economist working for REDSO looked at the banking system and was told, "There's no banking system." He went into the marketplace and found bankers with laptop computers doing their transactions. In the countryside, normal commerce has resumed. I think we tend to underestimate the resilience of traditional economic and political structures.

Somalia may never be anything more than a federation of states, but that federation of states will represent more of a consensus than what we've had in the past.

Ken Kornher: While the history of development shows us that the problems that we've encountered have more often arisen from the exercise of central power than the contrary, I don't think we should get caught up on the idea that only the exercise of decentralized power can be legitimate. In appropriate circumstances, both can be legitimate. The exercise of any power is made legitimate if there is a social compact, an agreement by the people that the use of power, whether it be central or local, is legitimate. That's the first thing. And the second is to reject the idea of sovereignty of the central state in favor of sovereignty of the people.

Dick McCall: There is a distinction between central power as a mechanism for control and central power as a mechanism to create rules of the game in a society where fairness and justice are accessible to all people in the society. I come from the West, Nebraska and Wyoming. Why were programs that brought irrigation districts and soil conservation districts so successful in turning this country into a surplus food producer? They were successful basically because they were producer-controlled associations. The federal government had an important role to play, but beneficiaries run the REA boards. The farmers run local irrigation districts. They lay down the rules and regulations. They know they have the local ownership.

The Lessons without Borders program brought a lot of things home to me that I had never really thought about. A lot of programs, however well-intentioned, will not work. For example, a national program for microenterprise development will not have much impact at the local level, because it doesn't reflect local reality and ownership. In Boston, representatives from HHS and HUD went into the community and said, " We can do this and that for you." The response from the community activists was, "No, you can't, because you don't understand our local reality. It's not a matter of what you can do for us. It's how we find a way to do it for ourselves."

The federal government has a role in trying to inculcate policies that open up the processes in our country to broad-based participation and access, but cannot be looked to for the solution to every conceivable problem.

Gordon Wagner: I would like to see the U.S. government articulate a set of principles as it reaches out to southern countries in emergency situations. One of these would have to do with participation. In Somalia,

these principles are being accepted by the rebels as the substantive basis for a partnership. Ultimately, however, to resolve conflict at the grassroots level, the central government has to come in. The center has to be the adjudicator of last resort.

Merging Traditional and Modern Techniques of Conflict Resolution

Chuck Kleymeyer (Inter-American Foundation): I would like to report on a series of workshops which have drawn together over a hundred grassroots leaders in the Andean countries. The purpose of these workshops is to design a dispute resolution and negotiation training manual. The manual will be used to train village-level and federation-level leaders.

One of the most interesting cases presented at the final workshop concerned a federation of about 140 communities in Amazonian Ecuador that sent two representatives to Plano, Texas, to carry out a 13-hour marathon negotiating meeting with ARCO. At the end of the meeting, the federation succeeded in getting all five of its demands met. This is not only a marriage of Western and traditional techniques, but it's a marriage of participation and conflict resolution.

Jerry Delli Priscoli: I remember some time ago, the Asia Foundation funded some training in Sri Lanka in dispute resolution techniques. Participants discovered that there's a great tradition in mediation in Sri Lanka that had been suppressed under British rule. Similarly, in my field of water resources, there are all sorts of local traditions in the Islamic world for conflict resolution and participation.

The Danger of Paternalism in Applying Conflict Resolution Techniques

Jerry Delli Priscoli: The Kettering Foundation and others have criticized the field of conflict resolution for falling back into the paternalistic paradigm: instead of the traditional substantive expert, a new "process" expert comes in and says, “I'm the mediator or the facilitator coming in to help with this situation.” This criticism needs to be taken seriously and addressed.

Highlights of a Conference on Preventive Diplomacy

Jennifer Douglas: I'd like to mention some of the major findings of the recent two-day conference, "Honing the Tools of Preventive Diplomacy." It covered early warning and prevention, lessons learned from the Greater Horn, and the role of culture and religion in conflict and its resolution (A summary I prepared of this event is available through E-mail to all members of the Participation Network).

Today there are 84 active internal wars around the world, not only between states but also between peoples, and there are approximately 252 minorities now at risk, with 52 considered to be severely at risk. To deal with so much conflict, we must learn to think strategically, and in preventive terms, look for the root causes of conflict, and muster the political will to address those causes. It was recommended that U.S. embassies include personnel that have expertise in the areas of religious affairs and conflict resolution.

Also discussed at the conference was the role of media in conflict prevention and early warning. Media can contribute to conflict if they are used by one group to demonize another, but if they are neutral and accessible, they can be used as a tool for early warning and as a channel to promote constructive communications between opposing sides.

Culture and language are important tools in conflict. They can be used as tools of war as well as tools for peace. Although the traditional religions in Africa historically allowed people of different beliefs to live together, when Christianity and Islam were introduced, people began to proselytize, in turn, dividing people and contributing to conflict and to war.

Some of the participants at the USAID conference were also at an international conflict resolution conference in Addis Ababa in September. The Addis conference stressed participatory approaches both for identifying root causes of conflicts and developing strategies to address them. Another point made was that conflict resolution skills are value-free. Unless they are used with a code of ethics, they can be used to co-opt people. The final point was that although no African leader has promoted the use of pre-colonial traditions, we're now hearing people talk about elders and the role of traditional decision-making models in conflict resolution. Formal governmental leaders in countries that are challenged may not want us to work directly with people who make decisions in a more traditional and participatory manner. We need to attempt to forge constructive linkages between traditional leaders and government leaders.

computerized planning models; learning participating management styles in developing and implementing reconstruction projects; employment of an important number of FSNs who are trained as effective facilitators and can maintain reconciliation communication among hostile factions; and engagement of leaders in using transparent accountability techniques in line with donor requirements for reconstruction projects.)"

■ **Participation and understanding root causes.** "The answer to Diane's third question is 'false.' To make the statement true, I would modify it as follows: Facilitated participation, when agreed to or sought, helps to mitigate conflict when it provides the mechanism through which the conflicting parties understand better and work through the basic reasons for conflict. It can be argued that this is the style within which President Jimmy Carter works."

Wafa Moussa: "Moroccan civil society still reflects forms of traditional governance. These include the *bureau de plante*, or complaints office, in the royal palace that listens to people and helps them resolve their problems. There are the *notables*, individuals with moral power, simultaneously political and religious, whose influence is linked with their relationship to local religious leaders. Finally, there are the *sherif*, who maintain the geneologies of former dynasties."

Communications from the E-Mail Bag

John Anderson: "My comments are intended to highlight some 'lower-key' points that need to be kept in mind by practitioners of conflict resolution."

■**Dispelling the mystique of technical/engineering expertise as the basis for solving political, interest-based problems.** "Where problems are pre-eminently interest-based, engineering/technical systems and design approaches should be subordinated to an approach/process for resolution of the conflict."

■**Looking for generic formulas to guide and structure conflict resolution may be illusory.** "We shouldn't 'technify' the process of 'conflict resolution services' as though adepts of a magical 'process' will lead recalcitrants more quickly to resolution of deeply entrenched conflicts. Of course, a skilled mediator can assist results, when parties to a conflict are ready to move toward settlement. Assessing these moments is key. Participation is crucial. But USAID should not have large expectations it can 'contract this out.'"

■**Sham versus real nongovernmental organizations.** "In southern Sudan there were many sham NGOs for every real one. Where the need for jobs and revenue is so intense, it should not shock us that so many so-called NGOs are operating on little more than a good chat and a small investment in letterhead. But this realization should guide our understanding of an essential aspect of 'participation': USAID and other donors must know the terrain and players, particularly before management oversight is ceded in the interests of more equal 'partnerships.'"

Diane La Voy: "As a follow-up to the forum, I would like to hear what members of the Participation Network might have to say on these three issues: (1) What have we learned about using traditional participatory structures and local participatory traditions in conflict resolution? (2) What is our experience with using participation at the national level in preventing or resolving conflict? (3) Is it true or false that participation helps to mitigate conflict only if it helps us understand and work through the basic reasons for the conflict?"

William Miner: "Regarding the third issue, why is it cast in either-or, all-or-nothing language? Perhaps the statement is true, but I would need more than its assertion in order to be persuaded. What would happen if there were benefits to participation in conflict resolution short of getting at and dealing with the basic reasons? I would not want to sacrifice them just because there weren't 'casual' benefits also."

Dayton Maxwell: "I'd like to comment on the questions posed by Diane La Voy on the nature of participatory traditions/structures in conflict resolution."

■ **Traditional participatory structures.** "Regarding Diane's first question, I recently conducted some discussion groups on the conflict in Sarajevo and had the groups rank how decision-making was made in Yugoslavia prior to the war on an authoritarian-democratic scale. The results confirmed what I've learned in developing countries: traditional participatory structures usually provide very limited help when it comes to conflict situations. Yet there are often circumstances in these situations which provide opportunities to build on existing structures and introduce new techniques in conflict resolution. (Some new techniques I am recommending for use in Bosnia include: